

Office for
Students



Access and participation data resources

User guide

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Introduction

1. This user guide is a basic introduction to using the access and participation data resources. It is intended for anyone new to the data, but, in particular, it should help higher education providers to navigate the dashboard, understand the contents, and use the information to develop their access and participation plans.
2. The data provide supporting evidence for providers to identify differences (or gaps) between different groups of students, set appropriate targets and support their strategy for reducing gaps between student groups. The OfS will also use them to review submitted plans. This document aims to help users understand what the data contains, and how to identify which measures are most relevant to each provider.
3. For a detailed understanding of all the data, this document should be read alongside the following documents:
 - ‘Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Access and participation indicators, methodology and rebuild descriptions’, which describes the indicators, including their coverage and presentation, and how they can be rebuilt from individualised student data¹.
 - ‘Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Core algorithms’, which includes further technical detail of the categorisations applied to individualised student data.²

Glossary

4. This document uses various terms. Some of the key ones are:
 - Access and participation data resources: includes the CSV files containing the data which underlie the dashboard, as well as the interactive dashboard, and the documentation (including this document and those detailed in paragraph 3).
 - Attribute: a subset of a characteristic (for example, ‘black’ is an attribute within the ‘ethnicity’ characteristic).
 - Characteristic: a categorisation of students (for example, ‘ethnicity’; also applies to combined categories, such as ‘white and POLAR4 quintile 1 or 2’)
 - Confidence interval: a statistical term which describes a range of values within which we are confident that the true value lies. See paragraph 44 for more details.
 - English IMD: index of multiple deprivation, as calculated in England only. It is calculated from a basket of measures which classifies areas in England by level of deprivation. It is

¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/guide-to-the-access-and-participation-data-resources/

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/guide-to-the-access-and-participation-data-resources/

presented here as five quintiles, where quintile 1 contains the most deprived 20 per cent of the English population, and quintile 5 the least deprived 20 per cent.

- Gap: the difference between two indicators, in percentage points (for example, the gap between a continuation rate of 98 per cent for non-disabled students and 95 per cent for disabled students would be 3 percentage points).
- Indicator: a percentage showing the proportion of students with a particular attribute or outcome.
- KPM: key performance measure. The OfS has set various KPMs relating to access and participation measures; for more details see the OfS website³.
- Measure: a generic term referring to any of the figures that we are calculating to measure performance.
- POLAR4: an area-based measure, classifying areas according to the likelihood of young people living within them of participating in higher education. Quintile 1 contains the areas with the lowest 20 per cent of participation rates for the young (18 year old) population; quintile 5 the highest participating 20 per cent. For more details see the OfS website⁴.
- Statistical significance: if a gap is (statistically) significant, then it is unlikely to be a result of chance or random variation alone.
- Student lifecycle: this term refers to the four stages of students' progression through higher education as described in paragraph 6.

³ Participation Performance Measures: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/>

⁴ POLAR – participation of local areas: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>

Overview of data resources

5. The access and participation data resources provide a consistent and transparent way to evaluate providers' access and participation performance. The data allows comparisons to be made between different student groups and their peers to identify gaps in access and outcomes.
6. The data resources provide measures of performance, for English registered providers, for each stage of the student life cycle:
 - a. Access indicators, detailing the makeup of students entering higher education.
 - b. Continuation indicators, reporting on whether students continue their higher education studies or not.
 - c. Attainment indicators, examining the proportions of Level 6+ graduates achieving first or upper second class degrees.
 - d. Progression indicators, reporting on the activity of students six months after leaving higher education, in terms of their progression to employment and higher-level study.
7. The data allows users to explore and understand patterns identified by these indicators for a range of student characteristics. The data shows characteristics for individual providers and the whole sector. The sector includes all English higher education providers that submit data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency or to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, including those who are not registered with the OfS. In each case, they are reported on separately for each stage of the student lifecycle and for each mode and level of study, across a five-year time series.
8. Across these characteristics, we report numbers and proportions of students, and we have also included confidence intervals for the indicator values, to help the user judge the potential sensitivity of an indicator to small numbers of students.
9. The data resources also compare students with different attributes within each characteristic (for example, the continuation rate of black students compared with white students within the characteristic of ethnicity). Resulting gaps between different groups are included, along with confidence intervals and statistical significance markers relating to each year's gaps. Where a gap is marked as statistically significant, this indicates that the difference observed is not due to random variation alone.
10. For three selected student characteristics (ethnicity, English IMD quintile and POLAR4 quintile), the access indicators are also referenced to the UK population. This means that the number of 18 year old entrants with the attribute in question (for example POLAR4 quintile 1) is presented as a proportion of the wider UK population with that attribute. Since this number would be very small for all providers, it is presented in terms of 'number of students per 10,000 of the UK population'. This measure effectively normalises different population sizes to allow comparison of access rates for students with different attributes across a characteristic.

Accessing the data

11. We have published an interactive dashboard showing summary charts and two ways to download the underlying data.
12. The data is provided for download in CSV format. This is a non-proprietary file type which is accessible using a variety of different software packages. For users of software packages capable of processing large volumes of data in a single file, the indicators for each provider registered with the OfS, and the English sector as a whole have been supplied in a single CSV file.
13. Users of MS Excel (version 2007 or later) may view indicators for each of the registered providers and the sector in separate CSV files. These have been compressed in a zip file for download. Note that providers who don't have any reportable data are not included in the single CSV file. However a blank worksheet has been included for such providers in the zipped group of CSV files.
14. All data resources have the same variables (columns) and measures (rows).
15. As set out in the outcomes of the OfS's consultation on the new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education⁵, the access and participation data resources include a visual and interactive dashboard of the data in the form of graphs that is available to view on the OfS website.

Navigating the data resources – CSV files

16. For the purposes of this user guide, we assume that the data for a single provider at a time is being viewed in MS Excel (version 2007 or later).
17. To view all the data relating to a particular indicator, we recommend that users highlight the header row and choose **filter** from the **data** menu in MS Excel to add a filter to every column. Each column can then be filtered as required.
18. For details of the variables in the data resources, see paragraphs 36 to 54. The measures that are potentially most applicable to the evaluation of access and participation are the gaps and ratios. Statistically significant gaps suggest inequalities between different groups.
19. There are two ways of locating significant measures, depending on whether you are interested in the change in a gap over time, or the significance of a gap in any one year.
20. If focussing on significant changes in a gap between years, then the *Significance_Y1toY5Change* (or Y4toY5 equivalent) column can be filtered to 'Yes'. The corresponding measure values will then be on the same row, under *Year1* to *Year5* columns. See the worked example at paragraph 64.

⁵ Please see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/

21. If looking for significant gaps in any one year, then that *Year[X]* column can be filtered to 'Yes'. Once these measures have been identified, the filter will have to be removed so that the values can be seen. The annual significance flags are always on a separate row to the actual values. See the worked example at paragraph 58.

The interactive dashboard

22. We have published the dashboard to help all users understand the data. Due to the volume of data, we have divided it into various tabs. For the best experience, we recommend using a desktop computer and making the dashboard full screen. This can be done by clicking the button on the toolbar at the bottom of the dashboard:



23. There are several filters on each page, in the form of drop-down lists which allow the user to select the measures to display on each chart.

How to interpret the charts

24. For each of the lifecycle stages, charts are shown for the selected provider on the left, and the sector as a whole on the right. The charts for part-time measures are displayed separately below those for full-time. Each chart shows the measure value over the five-year time series as points in a blue line. Confidence intervals, where they are appropriate, are shown as a grey lines either side of this blue line. A large gap between the grey lines indicates a large confidence interval. This reflects the fact that due to a small underlying population, this indicator is more sensitive to small variations in outcomes. For more detail see paragraph 44.
25. For each point in the time series, hovering the mouse pointer over the chart shows additional relevant information. For rates, the values of the rate and confidence intervals are shown in addition to the numerator and denominator from which the rate was derived. For gaps and ratios, the values of the gap, ratio and the confidence intervals of the gap are shown in addition to whether or not the gap is statistically significant in that year.
26. Below each chart, the change in the rate from year 1 to year 5 (and year 4 to year 5) is shown, and whether or not this change is statistically significant.

Tab 1: Title page

27. This page shows information about the dashboard and data contained within.

Tab 2: Key measures

28. The access and participation data resources contain information relevant to five of the OfS' Key Performance Measures (KPMs) relating to access and participation. These data are not always directly comparable to our published KPMs, for example because the resources contain rates across a number of modes and levels that are not equivalent to our KPMs. The five KPMs are

specifically outlined in paragraph 54 and detailed on the OfS website⁶. For each of the relevant rates, the related gaps are shown for the sector as well as the chosen provider. The KPMs relate to various stages of the student lifecycle.

Tabs 3-6: Access, Continuation, Success and Progression tabs

29. Each of these tabs reflect a stage of the student lifecycle. Within each tab there are multiple pages which can be selected using the yellow selection boxes at the top of the screen. These enable users to explore four different aspects of the access and participation data for that particular stage of the student lifecycle. These are:

- a. For the Access tab only, users can explore data that is referenced to the UK **population** to understand how the composition of higher education entrants differs to the composition of the wider population.
- b. For the Access tab, users can explore the **proportions** of students with different characteristics. For the Continuation, Attainment and Progression tabs, users can explore the **rates** at which students with different characteristics achieve the outcome in question.
- c. For the Continuation, Attainment and Progression tabs, users can explore the **gaps** between the rates at which students with different characteristics achieve the outcome in question.
- d. Where gaps have been calculated, users may also identify those that have been determined to be **statistically significant**, which tells them that the difference observed is not due to random variation alone.

Comparisons to the population (for the Access tab only)

30. For the access lifecycle stage the data included in the dashboard reports on the profile of a higher education provider's entrants, and shows differences in the numbers and proportions of students with different characteristics. This means that gaps and ratios between different groups carry a different meaning and are not shown for most characteristics – instead, additional charts are presented showing population-referenced proportions. These measures show the proportion of 18 year-old entrants with a particular characteristic (ethnicity, English IMD quintile, POLAR4 quintile) at the selected provider compared to the total UK population of 18 year-olds with that same characteristic (English population of 18 year olds for English IMD quintile only). See paragraph 45 for details about these variables in the CSV files.

31. The gaps and ratios here are showing the differences between the composition of the provider's entrant population and the composition of the wider UK population. For example, if 10 per cent of the UK population of 18 year olds in one year were black while 8 per cent of the 18 year old entrants at a provider in that same year were black, the gap would be +2 percentage points, and the ratio 1.25 (10 divided by 8).

32. In order to compare the provider's access indicators for all of the attributes across the characteristic in question (for example, access rates of all POLAR4 quintiles against each

⁶ Participation Performance Measures: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/>

other), the 'per 10k UK population' figures are presented in separate charts. These show the number of 18 year old entrants with each attribute expressed as a proportion of the wider UK population of 18 year olds with that attribute (only the English population for IMD quintiles). This means that access rates of groups with unequal population sizes can be compared. If access were completely equal, then all of the lines on this chart would coincide. That is, the number of 18 year-old entrants with each characteristic reflected the proportion of the wider UK population with that characteristic.

Proportions (for the Access tab), or Rates (for the Continuation, Attainment and Progression tabs)

33. Users can select the broad characteristic of interest (see paragraph 48), then the more granular attribute of that split (for example, characteristic: 'Age on commencement'; attribute: 'Young (under 21)'). For the Access tab, the dashboard will display information on the profile of entrants with respect to that characteristic, for the provider and the whole sector. For the Continuation, Attainment and Progression tabs, the dashboard will display the proportion of students with that attribute that have achieved the outcome in question (for example, the continuation rate for the 'Young (under 21)' group).

Gaps (for the Continuation, Attainment and Progression tabs only)

34. The user must first select the broad split characteristic of interest (see paragraph 48), then the more granular split comparison (for example, characteristic: 'Age on commencement'; comparison: 'Young (under 21) vs Mature (21 and over)'). The charts will then show the percentage point gap between the outcomes of students in the two split categories, over each of the five years in the time series for both the sector as a whole and the selected provider. Also shown on the charts is the confidence interval for the gap: additional grey lines that are a wide distance apart indicate a large confidence interval. This can often reflect a small underlying population or an indicator that is sensitive to variations in outcomes. See paragraph 44 for more about confidence intervals.

Statistically significant differences

35. This page lists the measures for which statistically significant gaps exist. Since there are many possible comparisons of (and within) characteristics that users can make, this page is included to help guide users to consider those groups which may be of most interest when developing access and participation plans. For details of the methodology used to calculate statistical significance, see the methodology and rebuild instructions document.

Variable descriptions

36. This section describes the variables included in the access and participation dataset. A more detailed description, including algorithms used to derive values from the individualised files, can be found in the methodology and rebuild instructions. In case of any discrepancies, the methodology and core algorithms documents take precedence over this document.

Provider_UKPRN

37. The UKPRN of the provider, reported in the individualised student data as the provider at which the student is registered. Contains the value 'SECTOR' for the whole sector indicators.

Provider_name

38. The full legal name of the provider.

LifeCycleStage

39. This corresponds to the four stages of the student lifecycle:

- a. Access.
- b. Continuation.
- c. Attainment.
- d. Progression.

Population

40. This indicates the subset of students considered in the indicator. For access and continuation indicators, the population is entrants; for attainment and progression indicators, the population is qualifiers. For each student characteristic, the population is restricted to those with known attributes within that characteristic (for example for ethnicity, 'unknown', 'information refused' etc. are excluded from the indicator calculations). For some characteristics, the population is further restricted (indicated by *Population* having a value of 'Entrant*', 'Qualifier*' or 'Qualifier (L6+)*' on the dataset, depending on the lifecycle stage). This restriction applies to the following indicators:

- a. Free school meals: only students who can be matched to records in the National Pupil Database (NPD).
- b. IMD: only English-domiciled students.
- c. POLAR4: young entrants only (aged under 21 on entry to higher education).
- d. Interaction of sex with IMD or POLAR4: as for the IMD or POLAR4 populations respectively.

Mode_of_study

41. This is divided into full-time or part-time; all apprenticeships are treated as full-time.

Level_of_study

42. The following four levels are reported:

- a. First degree.
- b. Other undergraduate (except in the attainment lifecycle stage).
- c. Undergraduate with postgraduate components
- d. All undergraduates (the total of the three levels listed above).

MeasureType

43. The access and participation data resources present information for each attribute that includes:

- **Numerator** of the indicator. For the access indicators this is the number of students with the attribute in question, for the other indicators it is the number of students with the attribute in question who achieve the outcome being measured.
- **Denominator** of the indicator. For the access indicators this is the total number of entrants, for the other indicators it is the total number of students in the *population* with the attribute in question.
- **Indicator** (as a percentage) – calculated as the numerator divided by the denominator. For the access indicators this shows the proportion of the entrant cohort with the attribute in question, for the other indicators it is the continuation, attainment or progression rate as appropriate.
- **Upper_CI_limit_for_indicator** and **Lower_CI_limit_for_indicator** - the upper and lower limits of a 95 per cent confidence interval for the indicator value⁷.

44. When two attributes are compared (for example young students compared with mature students), the access and participation data resources present information that includes:

- **Gap**: the difference (expressed in percentage points) that results from subtracting the *indicator* value of split 2 from that of split 1.
- **Upper_CI_limit_for_gap** and **Lower_CI_limit_for_gap**: 95 per cent confidence interval upper and lower limits for the calculated gap.

⁷ This is calculated using an exact binomial proportions confidence interval.

- **Statistical_significance_of_gap**: whether or not the gap is statistically significant⁸. See the methodology and rebuild instructions for details of the statistical tests applied.
- **Ratio**: the ratio of the split 1 *indicator* to the split 2 *indicator*.

Note on confidence intervals: these figures are included to give an idea of the sensitivity of the indicator to small populations and the effects of random variation in the outcome being measured by the indicator. A large confidence interval is typically indicative of small numbers of students informing an indicator calculation and it is advisable to be cautious when interpreting that indicator.

For example, if there are only ten students in the population, and eight of them continued their studies, then just one student changing continuation outcome would make a 10 percentage point difference to the indicator. The confidence interval would reflect the magnitude of this effect.

45. Additionally, three characteristics within the access indicators (ethnicity, POLAR4 quintile, and IMD quintile) have the following contextual measures:

- a. **Distribution_18_year_olds**: Provider's distribution of 18 year-olds with the attribute in question, which can be considered relative to the UK population distribution of 18 year-olds with the same attribute (only English population for IMD quintiles).
 - i. Where *Split1* or *Split2* contains the suffix '_Age18' then this measure shows the proportion of 18 year old entrants at the provider with the attribute in question.
 - ii. Where *Split1* contains the suffix '_Population18' then this measure shows the distribution of 18 year olds in the wider UK population with the attribute in question.
- b. **Per_10k_UK_population**: the number of 18 year-old entrants with each attribute expressed as a proportion of the wider UK population of 18 year-olds with that attribute (only English population for IMD quintiles).

46. Each of the measures listed in paragraph 43 to 45 are reported on separate rows in the dataset.

MeasureDetail

47. A brief description of the measure types detailed above.

⁸ For most gaps this is based on a two tailed student's t-test. A chi squared test is instead used to determine the statistical significance of gaps that relate to the access stage of the student lifecycle.

Splittype

48. This is the student characteristic that *Split1* and/or *Split2* relates to (for example 'Ethnicity').

Split1

49. This is an attribute of a student characteristic. When only one attribute is considered (equating to the *MeasureTypes* described in paragraph 43), this variable defines the attribute under consideration (for example number of black entrants). For comparisons of attributes (equating to the *MeasureTypes* detailed in paragraph 44), this shows the first attribute and should be read in combination with *Split2*.

Split2

50. When only one attribute is considered, this variable shows 'N/A'. For comparisons of attributes, this shows the second attribute for comparison (for example, for the gap in continuation rates between black and white students, *Split1* would show 'Black', and *Split2* would show 'White').

Year1 to Year5

51. Data is provided for the most recent five-year time series available, with Year1 being the earliest year and Year5 the latest. The academic years that these correspond to varies between indicators, due to data availability and indicator definition:

- a. For access indicators, Year1 corresponds to 2013-14, and Year5 to 2017-18.
- b. For continuation indicators, for full-time and all apprenticeship students, Year1 corresponds to 2012-13, and Year5 to 2016-17. For part-time students, Year1 of the continuation indicators corresponds to 2011-12, and Year5 to 2015-16.
- c. For attainment indicators, Year1 corresponds to 2013-14, and Year5 to 2017-18.
- d. For progression indicators, Year1 corresponds to 2012-13, and Year5 to 2016-17.

CHANGE_Year1_TO_Year5, CHANGE_Year4_TO_Year5

52. The difference between the measure value from Year1 to Year5; and from Year4 to Year5 respectively.

Significance_Y1toY5Change, Significance_Y4toY5Change

53. Flag to indicate statistical significance of the Year1 to Year5 change in the *Gap* and the Year4 to Year5 change in the *Gap* respectively. For details of the methodology used to calculate statistical significance, see the methodology and rebuild instructions.

OfSKPM

54. There are four indicators that are relevant (but not directly comparable to) to the OfS Key Performance Measures (KPM)⁹. This variable is shown as 'Yes_KPMX' (where X is replaced by the KPM number or numbers) if the indicator corresponds to one of these.
- a. KPM 1 and 2: Gap in participation¹⁰ between most and least represented groups (participation rates of students from POLAR4 quintile 1 areas compared with quintile 5 areas).
 - b. KPM 3: Gap in continuation rates between most and least represented groups (students from POLAR4 quintile 1 areas compared with quintile 5 areas).
 - c. KPM 4: Gap in attainment between white students and black students.
 - d. KPM 5: Gap in attainment between disabled students and non-disabled students.
55. See the worked example at paragraph 68 for an example of considering a KPM indicator.

⁹ For details, see OfS website, Participation Performance Measures:
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/>

¹⁰ Participation means accessing higher education in this context.

Worked examples – navigating the CSV files

56. The following worked examples have been provided to illustrate some techniques that you may wish to use when navigating a provider's data as published in CSV format, and finding relevant measures. They are not intended to be a guide as to the measures that should be included in access and participation plans.

57. These examples are based on the sector file; the methods and concepts are equally applicable to individual provider files.

Worked example 1 – finding significant gaps in a single year

58. Open APP2021_SECTOR.csv in MS Excel. Highlight the header row, and choose **filter** from the **data** menu.

59. Filter *LifeCycleStage* to 'Continuation'. Filter *SplitType* to 'POLAR4Quintile'. Filter *Year5* to 'Yes'. Observe that *MeasureType* shows 'STATISTICAL_SIGNIFICANCE_OF_GAP', as this is the only measure with a 'Yes'/'No' flag.

60. There are significant gaps for a large number of splits. Filter *Split1* to 'POLAR4Q5' and *Split2* to 'POLAR4Q1'.

61. This shows that the gaps are significant across most modes and levels of study. We will look at full-time first degree only, so filter *Mode_Of_Study* to 'Full-time or apprenticeship' and *Level_Of_Study* to 'First degree'.

62. Remove the filter on *Year5* by selecting '(Select all)'. You should then see five rows, each with a different *MeasureType*. 'GAP' shows the values for the percentage point gap (4.3 per cent in *Year5*). Observe that the confidence interval is small (3.4 per cent to 5.1 per cent), as the population under consideration here (UK-domiciled young entrants across the whole sector with known POLAR4 quintiles) is relatively large.

63. If you wish to chart a time series, highlight the 'GAP' values from *Year1* to *Year5* and create a new chart in Excel. This illustrates that the participation gap between the most and least represented groups is widening over the period in question.

Worked example 2 – finding significant changes between year 4 and year 5

64. Open APP2021_SECTOR.csv in MS Excel. Highlight the header row, and choose **filter** from the **data** menu.

65. Filter *LifeCycleStage* to 'Progression'. Filter *SplitType* to 'Sex'. Filter *Significance_Y4toY5Change* to 'Yes'. Observe that *MeasureType* shows 'GAP', as this is the only measure that can have statistically significant changes from one year to another.

66. In this case, there are only significant changes for part-time study for other undergraduate level and all undergraduates.

67. The *Change_Year4_to_Year5* column shows -3.4pp for all undergraduates; this can be confirmed by inspecting the values for the gap in the *Year4* and *Year5* columns. This shows that the gap between men and women progressing to highly-skilled employment or higher level study after graduation has reduced for all part-time undergraduates in the most recent year.

Worked example 3 – finding data relevant to the OfS KPMs

68. Open APP2021_SECTOR.csv in MS Excel. Highlight the header row, and choose **filter** from the **data** menu.

69. Filter *LifeCycleStage* to 'Attainment'. Filter *OfSKPM* to 'Yes_KPM5'. Filter *Split1* to 'NoKnownDisability'. Filter *Split2* to 'Disabled'.

70. It is not immediately apparent which measures are significant or not. Hence, filter *MeasureType* to 'STATISTICAL_SIGNIFICANCE_OF_GAP'. The distribution of 'Yes' and 'No' in columns *Year1* to *Year5* shows which years and measures to focus on. In this case, almost all gaps are significant.

71. Filter *Mode_Of_Study* to 'Full-time or apprenticeship' and *Level_Of_Study* to 'All undergraduates', and clear the filter from *MeasureType*. We can now see the gaps, as well as the confidence intervals. We can see that the gap between disabled and non-disabled graduates achieving first or upper second class degrees is statistically significant in each year, and seems to be reducing over the time series. Note however that in this case, the *Significance_Y1toY5Change* column shows 'No'. Examining the confidence intervals, we can see that these are relatively large, and in fact overlap for the years in question. It is advisable therefore to be cautious when discussing the trajectory of such a measure.



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www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/